

PEAKS OF SHALA

ooo trembling like a convalescent, but with fever gone and my lungs merely aching. I suggest the remedy for what it is worth.

- [417] The byraktor received us at his gateway, for his house was surrounded by a high fence, almost a stockade, of woven branches. He was a tall, keen, quick man; bright, dark eyes and aquiline nose and thin, flexible lips, framed by the white turban's fold beneath his chin; a jacket of black sheep's wool; one massive jeweled silver chain on his breast. His swift smile was warm and beautiful, but one had a sense of reservations behind it; he welcomed the audacious Shala man without a quiver, and ushered us up the stone steps to the second floor of his house.

[342] There were several rooms¹, divided from the main large one by partitions of woven willow boughs, and from the large room a high, arched doorway in the stone wall led into farther regions.

- 592 At least forty men and women and children—five generations—were around the fire on the floor¹. There was a little flurry of welcome and rearrangement, and in a moment we were in the center of the circle, sitting on thick mats of woven straw, while the byraktor made our coffee in the coals.

[302] The women were beautifully dressed; I had not seen so much elegance of embroidery, of colored headkerchiefs, earrings, and chains of silver and gold coins. Their dark, beautifully modeled faces, large dark eyes, and heavy braids of black hair were set off by the profusion of rich

¹[House of war chief of Sheshi—252] Analyst]

BOUNDARIES

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greediest man would not venture to disturb the cairn or to steal land for which another had lost his life.

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Near boundaries of villages and tribes might be won with a boulder and distant boundaries with a slab of rock. In the former event what was a contest in throwing the heavy weight took place; in so poor a country the weight could only be a stone. When the two tribes had quarrelled over a boundary each selected a champion athlete to throw the weight. Whichever threw it farthest won the land in dispute for the tribe. Father Gjeçov does not make it clear where the men stood for the throw. When more distant boundaries were in question, each champion carried a slab of stone or a rock on his back until he dropped under it. The one who held out longest won all the ground he had covered for his tribe.

The relations between a boundary and adjoining structures, such as a fence, wall or house, and natural features like hedges, trees and ditches, were as carefully regulated as the site of the boundary.

A fence or a wall generally enclosed a farmyard and sometimes a field, a vineyard or the like. Fences were made of hurdles or, much oftener, withered Christ's Thorn, depending on what grew in the locality. In the marshes at the mouth of the river Mat withies were interlaced between living willow trees planted like posts in the ditches surrounding the fields. In well-watered areas inland hedges of living Christ's Thorn were common. Walls were usually dry, like Scottish dykes; the more pretentious had their stones bedded in mud. Dry or mud, they were rare round fields, because fences were easier to make and less trouble to maintain. In upland pastures there were neither fences nor walls, presumably because the boundaries were too long. The rules for both fences and walls were pretty much the same.

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When an old farmyard was divided between two brothers or cousins who were on friendly terms, their respective portions were separated only by boundary stones. When they were not on friendly terms what they did depended on the degree of their enmity. If not embittered, they built a wall three spans wide (60 cm.) or a fence, centred exactly over the boundary line and possibly broken by a door that led from one yard to the other. Each built half of the barrier and became the recognized proprietor of what he built. When it was a wall he made a square niche on his own side to mark his ownership. When it was a fence he had no such material way of safeguarding his rights but could always rely on

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417 public memory. If only one of the two wanted a barrier, he had to
 423 build it unaided and entirely on his own ground, leaving the
 596 boundary stones on his neighbour's side. In this case its position
 relative to these stones was enough to show whose it was, but he
 nevertheless constructed the usual niche on his own side. He
 could not, however, build the wall right against the boundary
 stones but had to leave its width free between them and its outer
 base. For the law said that any rain that fell on a man's house or
 wall must run off on his own ground and not damage his neighbour's
 property. It needed no legal compulsion, of course, to make him
 construct the various buildings in his own yard in such a position
 that their drips did not damage his fence. Incidentally the 60 cm.
 of free space served at need for a footpath. When two brothers
 were embittered, each built a partition wall, naturally without
 a communicating door.

685 If a man wilfully damaged a tree or other property on his
 neighbour's land he had to answer for his crime by paying
 damages. If a stranger who did not know he was trespassing on
 another's property and was not warned off by a shout from the
 owner did similar damage, he, too, had to appear before the elders.

[672] But if he could prove ignorance of trespass, he had no damage to
 [351] pay. To keep animals under control so that they should not stray
 to another's property, a wall or at least a fence round the yard was
 an essential concomitant of a house. This too had to be its own
 thickness inside its owner's boundary to guarantee that rain drips
 [425] did not damage the ground next door. In the Malësi e Madhe the
 man building the wall could claim any timber that during building
 operations fell not more than half-way down on his neighbour's
 side. But whatever fell more than half-way or reached the ground—
 even the scrap of land he had left himself between the wall and the
 boundary—became his neighbour's. This discrimination applied
 to every form of wall.

351 Sometimes when one of two brothers was enclosing his yard he
 596 was permitted to utilize his neighbour's wall for one side of his
 417 enclosure. There was no risk of this confusing the ownership of the
 wall, for the neighbour, when building it, had not only put
 a proprietor's niche on his own side but had also left the boundary
 stones outside so that they fell within the new yard. A more
 distant relative could not utilize an existing wall, but had to build
 one of his own, parallel to the neighbour's and distant by the

regulation width from the boundary. If this involved him in more expense it also saved him and his descendants from ever quarrelling about the wall. It also gave his dog room enough to run round his house at night, a not unimportant point. But even a brother could not be allowed to erect a building against his neighbour's wall. The risk from the drips of rain from it was too serious.

If one neighbour wished to fence or wall in his field he did no wrong, strictly speaking, by building the barrier along the middle of the grass-grown footpath along the boundary between fields, and so on the very boundary line. But this caused so many quarrels that in Mirditë and the Malësi e Madhe the law bade him leave the width of his barrier free between its outer base and the boundary, just as he must do when building a wall across his courtyard. In its wisdom the law was providing for the future.

Theoretically, a man could not only build his fence or wall along a boundary line, but could also ask his neighbour to make half of it. In practice, however, the neighbour might be too lazy or might say he was too poor or too ill to do his bit. In Kastrat¹ he could be fined 250 grosh and three rams for his unneighbourliness, and this possibility sometimes drove him to action. In the ingenious Malësi e Madhe the first man might in malice run up a fence parallel to the boundary but with an opening sixteen spans (3·20 metres) wide at either end. This ensured that his animals strayed through the opening on to his bad neighbour's field and ate it up. To give the neighbour no chance to make him move his fence he ran it up four spans, half the width of the horse-track, from the boundary. Most men, however, preferred to make the whole fence themselves, constructing it at least half the width of a footpath from the boundary. If two neighbours made half the fence each, but one made his half badly, this man was at fault—whether his sheep strayed into the good fencer's field or the good fencer's into his. The loss always fell on him; in the first case he had to compensate his neighbour, and in the second he had no right to be compensated for the damage done by the animals.

Sometimes a man wished to fence in a field which was bounded by a road. In Krasniqë and some other hilly districts he had to leave a strip of his land as well to allow for the fence slipping down on to the road, an ever likely possibility.

Most hedges of dead thorn were directly over the boundary line,

¹ See Appendix, Document V, § 11, p. 264.

417 and if properly placed to begin with, caused no trouble. The same
 635 was true of living hedges inland. On the other hand, living hedges
 [641] in the marshy areas near the mouth of the river Mat sometimes
 grew so tall that they damaged the neighbouring land with their
 shade. To prevent this, the owner had to lop overgrown trees once
 every three years. Failing this, his neighbour could complain to
 the headman; inevitably they gave him leave to cut the trees down
 to the root on the owner's ground, an intrusion that was in itself
 a punishment, and fined the owner 250-450 grosh for breaking the
 law about lopping.

423 Similar rules regulated the planting of fruit and other trees, olives
 245 being included among the former. In Mirditë a fruit tree might be
 planted only 5 'feet' (1 metre) from the boundary; another kind
 had to be at least 10 feet away. In Godolesh, a great fruit-growing
 area, a fruit tree could be planted on the very boundary, but in
 adjacent Labinot it had to be a span away. In Shkrel it could be
 planted anywhere on one's own ground, as it never caused trouble
 [685] by itself. As with living hedges, care had to be taken that a tree did
 not cast harmful shade over a neighbour's land. If one did so in
 Shkrel the owner agreed amicably to lop it, raising no objections
 unless he had already quarrelled with his neighbour over something
 else. In Mirditë he was bound to lop the offending branches; if
 he failed to do so his neighbour could lop them as high as he could
 reach with a hook, the handle of which did not exceed $3\frac{1}{2}$ spans in
 length. In the mountains of Lesh the owner had to uproot the tree
 or to pay annual damages to his neighbour. In Godolesh the
 neighbour was entitled to stretch as far as he could and cut the too
 luxuriant branches with his short-handled axe. If a tree was
 doing no damage to neighbouring ground, it could not be lopped
 except by its owner. A man who transgressed this law in Mirditë
 had to pay its owner 500 grosh.

312 Sometimes an open drain adjoined a boundary. When it was
 423 first cut, each of the two neighbours provided half the ground
 476 required, did half the work and retained the earth excavated from
 his own side. Three stones, one big and two small, were left at the
 head to mark the boundary; the two other sets, normally placed in
 the middle and at the foot, were removed to make room for the
 water; as the drain discharged into a bigger channel, they could
 not possibly be left at the foot. The boundary naturally ran exactly
 down the middle. In most places the drain had to be cleared out

685 of theft which were no less universally regarded as shameful. A man who stole from another with whom he had broken bread as host or guest disgraced himself for ever. A woman must not steal for fun or spite. If she did, not only her husband's family, but the whole village felt ashamed and took steps to deal with her.

[672] The accomplice who helped the thief, the host who fed him and the receiver who hid the booty were all considered as no less guilty than the thief himself. 'A thief and his host are the same', and 'Like thief, like receiver' were common sayings. All had to suffer punishment in proportion to their share in the crime and booty. The owner of stolen goods had the right to remove them from the premises of a receiver and to claim compensation, and the receiver had no legal claim for redress as against the thief. On the other hand, if a man bought stolen goods in good faith he had to give them back to the rightful owner, but he was entitled to recover what he had paid for them from the thief.

231 All possible means of protection against theft were adopted by the mountain peoples. Every man carried a gun by day, and slept with it beside him at night. Dogs were kept in every house and sheepfold. Domestic animals were branded with a mark that could not be destroyed, as when sheep had both their ears notched.

[351] Farmyards were surrounded by walls too high to scale and had stout wooden gates heavily bolted at night. Thieves, however, could • [117] make holes in the mud and stone walls, and frequently forced an entry that way. The walls of many village shops were lined with wood, so that a thief's chisel, striking it, would make sufficient noise to put the householder on the alert.

[125] In Turkish times many villages sent out armed patrols every night, composed not of professionals like the night watchman of the towns, but of unpaid villagers who served in turn as directed by the village headman. When there was danger of sheep-stealing on a large scale, the threatened villages sometimes bought the protection of some strong man. For example, the villagers of Reç, now in Yugoslavia, hired protection from sheep-stealers of Dibër by paying the Kaloshi family of Dibër a thousand napoleons a year. Nor were the parties deterred from contracting together by the fact that the Kaloshis were Moslems and Albanians, and the villagers of Reç were Orthodox and Macedonian Bulgars.

627 In the extreme north and south of the mountains, guns could
695 legitimately be used when a thief was caught in the act of breaking

Villages & Houses

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A wide rudely made ladder leads to the first floor, along³⁵² which runs a passage, or *hodnik*, four or five feet broad, made of uneven and draughty planks that give precarious^[417] hold to Western shoes. Dark cupboards of rooms open on both sides, one for each married man of the *zadruga*, with his wife and children. Sometimes they possess a window-slit, sometimes not. They are furnished with nothing besides a home-made plank bed, covered with the much-valued long-fleeced sheepskin rugs, made from sheep that have never been shorn, a clothes-chest, a loom, a distaff, and a stock of cotton and fleece.

In houses with only one top storey the large guest-room takes up the whole width of the house at one end of the passage. At the other end is the small apse-closet. But in a house with two upper storeys the entire top floor is devoted to the guest-room, which is reached by another perilous home-made ladder.^[342]

This guest-chamber is far the largest and best-furnished room in the house; its ceiling, however, is as low as the rest. The floor-boards fit better, although, as in the other rooms, the door rests on a fixed barrier, twelve inches high, which keeps off draughts from those who are reclining on rugs or mats. A half or a third of the floor is spread with carpets, and enclosed by a low wooden kerb. Here against the walls are laid many long stiff cushions, tight with wool or straw, and covered with coarse hand-woven woollen stuff, worked in bright greens, reds, whites, and purples,^[531] in chevron-like patterns on a black or yellow ground. These colours, in similar bold Albanian designs, are repeated on the light wood of the doors, unless these are carved instead. Outside the kerb stands a kind of bed-seat, about a foot high, with very simply carved back and arms, spread with the finest of the long-fleeced sheepskins. On one side of the room the fire burns within an immense chimney-place, projecting far into the room and reaching up to the low roof.^[354]

The men have their meals in the guest-chamber. They²⁶⁴ sit cross-legged and unshod upon cushions round the *sofra*,⁵¹⁶ eating from the dishes brought as far as the door by the⁵⁶²

on the wall. When the stairway leads to the second floor on the outside, the ground floor is generally used by women and also has the stables (Nopcsa, 1925: 58). Since the space in the kula is limited, women commonly reside in a one-story women's house, which is not necessarily built like the kula. If the kula gets too small for the family a second one may be built; the new entrance facing the old. They try to have the entrance protected by some other building and not directly in view.

Interior partitioning walls are never of stone, as this is too heavy and would have to be continued to the ground floor. Partitions are generally of woven brushwood, boards or sometimes large objects are placed so as to form a division. Windows are missing entirely in simpler houses. In the mountains they are small, narrow, glassless and resemble loopholes. They are just large enough to look through, and at night are shut with heavy boards. The fireplace is always along the short wall of the house. It is square in form and made of stone slabs bordered by wooden beams, or of stones that are half buried in the ground. When the floor is of wood an area 20 centimeters deep is cut out for the fireplace and filled with mud for insulation from the fire. This is necessary in two-story houses. The fireplace generally rises only 10 centimeters above the floor. A horizontal beam may extend from the wall over the fireplace. On it is attached a metal chain on which hangs the cauldron. Sometimes a grating of wood is suspended over it for drying meat and to attach pots. The ceiling usually does not project over the fireplace. Sometimes a baldachine-like structure is placed over it; this is a wooden frame, filled with wickerwork and plastered with mud. Between the wall and the fireplace there is often a built-in stone bench. This is sometimes set into a niche. Occasionally there is a smokehole set over the niche (fig. 55) (Nopcsa, 1925: 81).

Farm Buildings. The yard enclosure is generally a fence of wicker. Occasionally the fields are also enclosed, but less completely. The fence may consist of poles stuck into the ground at regular intervals and bound in two or three places with twine. It may be of wickerwork or poles set close to one another and fastened with a horizontal beam close to the top. Dry masonry is also used (Nopcsa, 1925: 15-16). The yard may be enclosed by stone walls, 7-8 feet high, which are connected with the buildings, together with which they form an enclosure (fig. 43) (Patach, 1904: 26-27). Nopcsa maintains that the high enclosures and large portals are lacking in Catholic settlements. I was unable to find out just how prevalent high stone walls are in Albania. While one might assume them to be an advantage in defense, one finds that many of the fortress-like buildings are surrounded by extremely weak fences (Nopcsa, 1925: figs. 9, 39, 41).

The kukor is a frame of horizontal boards set on poles 2 meters high. It is not roofed over and is reached by a ladder, generally a notched tree trunk. It is used for the safekeeping of meat, etc. (Houses do not have an attic for storage.) (Nopcsa, 1925: 19-20). The kol for the storage of corn is the same as that used in Serbia, i.e. a circular wickerwork structure.